



D U R H A M

Open Space & Trails Commission

ANNUAL REPORT

January 2014 to January 2015

Introduction

The Durham Open Space and Trails Commission (DOST) is an advisory commission charged with advising the City Council and the Board of Commissioners on matters relating to open space preservation and trail development while involving and educating all segments of the Durham Community. Additionally, the Commission has a mission to foster the wise use of Durham's natural resources. The Commission consists of eight members appointed by both the City Council and Board of Commissioners, four elected or appointed officials, and up to 10 members appointed by the Commission. Membership for 2014 was 22 and included the following individuals: Jeffery Bakalchuck, Sara Dwyer, Alexa Kleysteuber, Abigail Van de Bogert, Sunny Carrington-Hahn, Aspen Price, Brian Buzby, Joe Jackson, John Goebel (Vice Chair), Debra Hawkins, Eric Ireland, Charles Welch, Perry Whitted, Artemas "Lee" Holden, Annette Montgomery, County Commissioner, Ellen Reckhow, LaDawnna Summers (Chair), Reynolds Smith, (Planning Commission) Thomas Stark, Will Wilson, Councilman Steve Schewel and Alternate Don Moffitt. A new member has been appointed for 2015, Dave Connelly.

As an advisory board with reporting responsibility to both the City Council and the Board of Commissioners, the Commission pursues activities through regular monthly meetings of the full body of the DOST. These meetings are held the third Wednesday of every month at 7:00 pm in the Committee Room on the second floor of City Hall. To facilitate activities, the Commission has the following committees that meet on a monthly or as-needed basis: Trails, Matching Grants, Development Review, Community Education, Finance, Open Space, and Diversity. These committees bring forward issues and proposals for consideration and action by DOST. This report summarizes and gives an overview of the activities of these committees where appropriate as well as the activities of the City of Durham and Durham County as they relate to the Durham Open Space and Trails Commission.

Trails Committee

The Trails Committee, in accordance with DOST, makes recommendations to the Durham Parks and Recreation (DPR) and the City-County Planning Department as well as elected bodies on trails and greenways, development priorities, new trails and greenway routes, and trail proposals prepared by design consultants.

The Trails Committee has overseen a number of projects this year and with the American Tobacco Trail now finished the most recent reports from the Institute for Transportation Research and Education indicate a 133% increase of trail users with the completion of the bridge over 40.

The Duke Beltline which wraps around northern downtown is potentially still available for purchase from Norfolk Southern although not at the price that the City has offered. Norfolk Southern may choose to enter into abandonment procedures of the Right of Way corridor for the Beltline this year. The City has been actively pursuing the corridor in conjunction with NCDOT. Financing of the trail would be in part from the initial earmark of \$2 million. This past year the staff and the Trails Committee worked extensively with Norfolk Southern, NCDOT and other departments to try and reach an agreement to purchase the Beltline. The City Manager has met with Norfolk Southern officials and actively pursued an offer to purchase with Norfolk Southern, at the request of the Beltline committee. The Duke Beltline project remains instrumental to our Downtown plan and our Trails plan. Staff, DOST and others continue to monitor the situation and insert themselves into the process to keep this alive. Maps were prepared by the Commission to highlight this acquisition. The committee has walked the Beltline to determine its functionality. There have been several meetings with elected officials and key individuals that highlighted the continued efforts of the community and business interests to keep pressing for the acquisition of the Beltline. This is ongoing.

In 2014 the Transportation Department was awarded a TIGER Planning Grant that will help evaluate the beltline's development feasibility. This should assist elected officials and others in their acquisition decision making process. The Trails Committee continues to stay abreast of the issue and has made requests that the governing bodies continue to pursue the Duke Beltline Trail as it provides for an excellent link to downtown and will serve as a major connector to neighborhoods and the active downtown re-development that is occurring. It is a top priority. Negotiations with Norfolk Southern have not been fruitful, and the \$2 million dollar earmark, now approaching a decade old, is at risk of rescission, unless the funding is quickly obligated on some rail trail project, such as the Panther Creek Trail in Eastern Durham, the Trent Street Spur, or the Old North Durham east/west connector. All of these corridor sections will need to be evaluated as to whether or not they are actually available for purchase. The Commission also requests that the governing bodies continue to pursue the Timberlake corridor as it provides for an excellent link to development in downtown and open space in Northern Durham and could serve as a major multi-modal connector. This was re-emphasized as a part of the Rougemont Village Plan.

To date, the completed sections of the North/South Greenway system (the top priority of the Master Plan) include a section of the American Tobacco Trail, Downtown Trail, South Ellerbe Creek Trail, Ellerbe Creek Trail, Stadium Drive Trail and Upper Warren Creek Trail, and the Third Fork Creek Trail. The remaining uncompleted portions include the Lower Warren Creek Trail and a section of the Third Fork Creek Trail that runs roughly parallel to the ATT. Because of its proximity to the ATT corridor, that section of the trail may take a lower priority or be eliminated from the plan. The site plans for the West Ellerbe Creek Trail sections have been submitted and approved, and acquisition of the sections of the trail on private properties is being pursued by General Services, to be completed soon.

The completed and under-construction projects generally represent the complete expenditure of City bond funds, the primary source for trail construction, including about \$3.5 million from 1990 and \$4.1 million from 1996. The Durham Open Space and Trails Commission members have been good stewards in seeking additional funding via other sources, such as grants and the City has received generous support from various other sources for trail construction, including in earlier years several million from the Transportation Efficiency Act (TEA-21) the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) and a Parks and Recreation Trust Fund (PARFTF) Grant, and (in 2011), \$800,000 from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) stimulus funding. Those funds have all been expended and Durham needs to consider another bond referendum. The Commission is also highly supportive of the creation of the Parks Foundation (501(c) 3), and the deferred maintenance funding for Parks and Trails. We appreciated the establishment of these which will allow Durham to have some additional revenue sources for trail construction, maintenance and acquisition in the near future.

Members of the trails committee have worked with neighborhood groups to advocate for design funding for extensions of both the West Ellerbe and Bryant Bridge/Rocky Creek Trails. This funding was secured and placed in the Capital Improvements Program (CIP). The slow progress of the West Ellerbe Creek Trail and the funding dedicated to the ATT parking lot on Scott King Rd. has meant that the Bryant Bridge /Rocky Creek Trail project has been moved to next year's CIP. Additional connections to the neighborhood are needed. Since the R. Kelly Bryant Bridge is a major connection to the neighborhood, Trails Committee members are seeking connections to that bridge through funding through the NCDOT TIP; that funding will be requested in the CIP in FY 16/17.

The trails committee is in the process of creating a data base of trail easements that have been acquired and those that need to be acquired. That project is ongoing. The committee also worked with the Planning Department and Parks and Recreation to provide an interactive data base map showing the acquisition status of segments of planned trails in the Master Plan. This serves as a useful tool to estimate acquisition costs required for the development of planned trails.

Sandy Creek Park received a grant from the County Matching Grants Program in 2013 which has enabled the completion of a number of projects at the Park including new signage and a bird watching area as well as plantings and upgrades to the facility; a tremendous amount of volunteer labor has gone in to creating the space. The Sandy Creek area continues to make progress with numerous volunteers and the leadership of the trails committee; much has been accomplished in 2014. That Park received a Golden Leaf Award for its appearance in 2014.

The Trails Committee has selected trails from the master plan that should receive priority in future land acquisition and construction funding. These trails are: The Duke Beltline, Third Fork Creek (extension), West Ellerbe Creek (extension), Pearson town Trail (extension) and Sandy Creek (extension), and Warren Creek (phase two). The committee is now in the process of re-examining the priority trails to see if any revisions need to be made to those priorities.

The Adopt-A-Trail program was initiated by the Trails Committee in conjunction with DPR and has continued to draw interest with a number of trails being adopted by various groups, schools, and organizations. The Trails Committee would like to see trail maintenance improved on these

trails and is working on various methods that would allow for greater citizen input. In addition, the Committee would like to see the continued acquisition and construction of trails throughout Durham. We recognize the need for additional funding. DOST plans to make a request for additional funding for trail design and construction on the next bond referendum proposal. The committee has been working with staff to allow and encourage trails that are built by the developer.

The Trails Committee is excited that Council looked at and approved a trail maintenance funding source for the upcoming fiscal year and that there be monies set aside for future maintenance of the trails and parks within our system. We look forward to progress on that. The commission will also continue to support the “Parks Foundation” in order to shore up funding sources for upcoming projects.

The committee conducted the second set of trail clean-up outings in 2014. Trails cleaned in the past include, the Upper Warren Creek Trail, Sandy Creek Trail and the Riddle Road Spur. This year the Trails Committee focused on the Sandy Creek Trails and provided additional trail construction and clean up to the Mountains to Sea Trail and the Hollow Rock Park Site. Sandy Creek benefited from over 200 volunteers and 1000 volunteer hours this year. These folks really have been instrumental in creating a space that will be accessible to handicapped individuals, hikers, birdwatchers and so many others. The plantings, and physical labor involved in completion of many of the projects within the park have completely transformed it. The committee takes the opportunity to contact nearby neighborhoods to help with the cleaning, and to give some background on each of the trails and projects at the beginning of each outing.

Sandy Creek Park and “Creek Week” in March continue to be big draws for the community. The trails committee has taken on the upgrading of some of the trails in Sandy Creek Park including maintenance on the existing bridge and construction of a bird blind within the park. They continue to focus on upgrades to the park that take a variety of forms, from improved access, and signage to wildlife viewing areas, fencing around the grassy areas, butterfly gardens, and increased educational activities for the surrounding community. The park is beginning to be a real centerpiece for the area because of all the hard work. We are hoping to make this a facility that is very accessible to handicapped individuals. Keep Durham Beautiful has been extremely helpful in facilitating improvements at Sandy Creek.

All of these initiatives are important as our neighborhoods become more vibrant and trail connections become more important for exercise, connections to downtown and our parks.

The Committee is continuing to focus on neighborhoods such as Sandy Creek and Northeast Central Durham and is working on additional funding, focusing on Healthy Mile Trails in conjunction with the Health Department and priority trails throughout the community.

Constructing trails requires patience and long range vision as a result of the slow parcel-by-parcel acquisition of trail corridors that is typically required as well as an often protracted contracting process. DOST feels that support for more funding, trail construction and acquisition should continue as a priority. Now that the ATT is complete Durham has only 29 miles of paved trails. We lag behind our Triangle neighbors in new construction.

Committee Goals for 2014 included: Establishing a trails priority listing, overseeing implementation of better trails signage, finishing our easement data base, meeting with trails groups in adjacent jurisdictions, keeping track of construction updates, working with the Finance Committee to promote funding for future trails, continue providing input to staff on community needs including reaching out to neighborhood groups, assisting with new trails maps, and more trail awareness in neighborhoods.

Mountains to Sea Trail. In 2006, the Durham Board of County Commissioners approved a Memorandum of Agreement (Agreement) on the Mountains to Sea Trail with five agencies for the section of the Mountains to the Sea Trail that runs through Durham County on lands owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE). The partners to the Agreement are Durham County, the USACE, the State Trails Division of the N.C. Division of Parks and Recreation (“NCDPR”), the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission (NCWRC), and a statewide non-profit group, the Friends of the Mountains to the Sea Trail (“FMST”). In Durham County the proposed trail runs through the Eno River State Park in the west, then through City-owned lands along West Point on the Eno Park, and East of 15-501 on City lands between West Point Park and the Falls Lake Reservoir lands and continues along the Eno River until the old Oxford Road area where the alignment runs through land owned by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for Falls Lake.

The Falls Lake section runs for approximately 29 miles all the way to the Durham/Wake County line. Durham is now connected to Hillsborough in Orange County with the construction of the last foot bridges completed on City Park property with this last phase of the trail in Durham in 2014. The statewide Mountains-to-Sea Trail volunteer organization has worked with Durham Parks and Recreation Department (DPR) to construct a natural surface trail from West Point Park to River Forest Park along the north bank of the Eno River; that trail is a section of the longer Mountains to Sea Trail and is complete. The Friends of the Mountains to Sea Trail volunteers having completed the 29 mile trail along Falls Lake between Durham and Wake County with Orange County connections hikers can go directly in to Hillsborough. Durham is the only county east of the mountains to have completed the MST in its jurisdiction.

Open Space Committee

Throughout the year the committee, in conjunction with staff, has been working on the Downtown Open Space Plan, the Urban Open Space Plan, easements, usage and acquisition and a number of other environmental concerns and issues including a letter of support for the Ellerbe Creek Watershed Association’s grant request for additional resources to manage new property acquired from Duke Energy. The Committee brought forward several resolutions that raised environmental awareness about water and sewer, watershed concerns, and land use in on sensitive areas. The Urban Open Space Plan is in the Planning Department work program and is moving forward in the planning process. The Downtown Open Space Plan was completed and adopted in October 2014.

The committee has developed a list serve group concerning open space issues, which contains around 130 members, (as of January 2015) and continues to be active in open space issues.

The Committee has presented several resolutions for DOST's consideration concerning environmental concerns that relate to Triangle Transit's proposed crossing of the New Hope Creek Corridor. Additionally they have kept abreast of environmental concerns that relate to the watershed. They continue to follow various environmental issues throughout Durham keeping elected officials updated with their concerns. The committee continues to bring forward concerns and issues that affect Durham and its open space. The Open Space Committee has been continuing to refine the Open Space Criteria that is used to help assess properties for proposed County open space acquisitions. In 2014, they held three rounds of site visits to sample urban open space properties to assist in refining their criteria.

Farmland Protection: The Open Space and Trails Commission coordinates with the Durham Farmland Protection Advisory Board through a liaison. For 2013, this liaison was Bo Glenn and then Perry Whitted. The Farmland Board hosted three Farmer well attended "Farmer Appreciation Breakfasts". These breakfasts provide an informal networking opportunity for local farmers and feature current topics of interest. These breakfasts are continuing a series that are provided in different locations in the county. On October 3, 2014, the farm Board hosted a tour of local farm sites for local elected officials including the school board members. The tour featured new educational sites and new local foods producing farms.

By the end of 2014, Durham County has permanently protected twelve farms with conservation easements totaling 1982 acres, at a Durham County average cost of \$1,094 per acre. The County has another 148 acres on three farms that have been awarded grant funds for conservation easements and are in progress, and another three for which funds are being sought. The new farm Bill was approved in 2014, and has significantly lower funding available for federal farm conservation easements. In 2014, funds for North Carolina totaled approximately 25 percent of the previous year's allocation.

New Hope /Hollow Rock Preservation: The Master Plan for the Hollow Rock Access Area was adopted in 2009/2010 by Durham County, the City of Durham, Chapel Hill, and Orange County, the four jurisdictions that participated in the purchase of the property. The Master Plan was developed with an advisory committee with several public input sessions. The master plan proposes a small parking area, nature trails, and interpretative displays about the significant history and ecology of the area for this northern anchor to the New Hope Creek corridor. There is no safe parking currently available at this location which creates a major impediment to formally opening the trails to public use. Informal use of trails is already occurring on the property which highlights the need to get safe facilities in place.

In late 2013, the County was awarded a state grant for \$200,000 to assist with construction of the Hollow Rock bridges and parking lot. The agreement was approved by the BOCC in January 2014, with the contract running from February 2014 to February 2016. During the summer of 2014, design work began on the pedestrian bridges, which should be ready for construction in

summer 2015. Orange County is anticipated to construct the parking lot, which is entirely within Orange County.

A new Interlocal Agreement between Orange and Durham counties regarding the construction and maintenance of this area is anticipated in the spring 2015.

Outreach

The Commission's mission to foster the wise use of Durham's natural resources along with acquisition of open spaces, greenway protection and trail development involves reaching out to the citizens of Durham. In order to achieve this goal, the Commission assists the City-County Planning Department, highlighting current environmental and recreational issues, and meets face to face with the public at Earth Day, Center Fest, and Festival for the Eno River. The Commission appreciates the funds that the Board of Commissioners and City Council contributed to the budget to help achieve these educational objectives. The Earth Day booth rental fee was paid for through those funds. The remaining funds will be used to pay for the additional re- printing and upgrading of the very popular Durham Trails and Greenways Bike Hike maps. A few additional educational materials are often possible with the remaining funds. This year's remaining funds were encumbered by the Department for additional printing needs on the bike/hike map and new banners for our commission.

Education

Throughout the year the education committee has continued to enhance the DOST website. The Committee and volunteers have done an outstanding job incorporating content into the website that explains DOST's goals and interests, and also informs the public about upcoming events and issues.

www.bikewalkdurham.org/dost
www.durhamost.org

Progress continues on orienting and educating neighborhood organizations, INC. and others to the nearest trails and open spaces, with the hopes that meeting with these groups and talking up DOST activities those groups will become more involved with what is happening in their neighborhoods.

The Educational Committee would like to pursue more vigorously the use of various Web sites and educational outreach programs that schools or other organizations may be involved in that promote trails and greenways. In order to do this more effectively, the Commission needs funds for some basic items for festival booth displays printings and presentation materials for enhancing public education.

The Community Education Committee staffs a Commission booth at the Earth Day Festival in April, the Eno River Festival in July, and Center Fest in September to inform the public about open space and trails programs, provide maps, and encourage community involvement. The Web site will continue to have a big presence and provide vital links to maps, other information.

Committee goals for 2014 included: Maintain a presence at each of the local festivals, publishing news via our web site, improving the DOST website with maps and additional tools and links, improving community presence and public awareness of DOST, supporting the other committees by helping to publicize their work and bring visibility to them through the web site (i.e., Urban Open Space, Matching Grants program, etc)

Development Review Committee

The Development Review Committee of the Commission screened over 350 site plans and plats and screened or made recommendations/comments on approximately 43 zoning map changes that had impacts on areas of the Trails and Greenways Master Plan as well as the Durham Inventory of Important Natural Areas, Plants, and Wildlife. These cases were reviewed by the Committee and recommendations brought forward by elected officials which upheld Durham's long standing effort at protection of Natural Heritage sites and corridors.

This has facilitated additional input into plans that have significant environmental/open space, inventory sites, and trails and greenways that are affected by development. The Development Review committee continues to monitor and make comments on plans before elected officials

The Development Review Committee studies and makes advisory comments on zoning map changes and site plans for projects regarding impacts to greenways and open space.

Committee goals for 2014 included; 1. Continue to review site plans and re-zoning requests and make written reports as determined by the committee, and DOST. 2. Continue to represent DOST on development issues. 3. Seek additional input as needed on updates for adopted Inventory and work with developers to seek trails that are publically accessible but developer constructed.

Finance Committee

The Finance Committee plans to meet several times in addition to the matching grants funding cycle to look at possible additional, non-public funding sources for trails and greenways. The Committee is considering how additional funding could be obtained from developers and/or the corporate community to facilitate trail construction.

The Committee has been instrumental in pulling together and researching our current financial situation on trails and greenways and continues to monitor how additional funding could be acquired through the Capital Improvement Project process. This group is also interested in long term financial maintenance of trails. The committee has been researching the costs of completed trails and their sources of funding and has continually followed budget constraints on trail funding sources.

This committee continues to reach out to Keep Durham Beautiful (KDB) in a joint effort to research and create a system for attracting private funds for public projects such as sponsorship of a trail or greenway, and to better coordinate volunteer activities for trail clean up days.

In addition the committee would like to work more closely to better connect the Recreation Advisory Board with DOST, and to support the Parks Foundation and funding for Parks and trail maintenance.

Committee goals for 2014 included: 1. Develop a database of past, current and future trail projects, 2. Investigate status or ability to collect contributions for trail funding from private sources, 3. Investigate potential funding strategies- CIP, bond referenda, impact fees, private contributions and to facilitate more neighborhood interaction with community trails. And support the Parks Foundation and Pennies for Parks.

Matching Grants Committee –Conducts the application process and recommends awards to the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) based on a set of criteria established by the Committee. Some previous projects have included tot lots, school playgrounds and open space acquisitions. The committee meets on an as-needed basis.

Committee goals for 2014 included: Annual review of criteria for any adjustments/corrections to the guidelines, continuing to increase opportunities to publicize the Matching Grants Program, lobbying County Commissioners to continue funding in their 2015 budget, reviewing and assessing applications, recommending selected recipients to DOST, delivering DOST approvals to the Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) for awards.

Durham County Matching Grants Program

Now in its twenty-fifth year, the Matching Grants Program continues to provide grants to community non-profit organizations for open space and recreation projects throughout the County. When budgetary feasible, Durham County contributes an annual allocation to support the Program. During the life of this Program, the County's investment of \$1,258,832 has leveraged over \$3 million in monetary and in-kind contributions.

Durham County Matching Grants Program		
	Program to Date	Year 2014
Number of Grants	70	2
Value of County Matching Grants	\$1,258,832	\$ 12,935
Total Value of Projects	\$3,466,523	\$ 26,135

For the 2014 Grant Cycle, the Committee approved two new projects. Details on the projects and award amounts are below:

Organization	Description	Grant Award
Eno River Association	Property Improvement, removal of non-native vegetation, enhanced recreational opportunities	\$12,400.00
Museum of Durham History	Planting of History Grove of Trees	\$ 535.00
TOTAL		\$12,935.00

County Commissioners approved \$77,175 in total Matching Grant funding for FY 2014-15. Matching Grant awards are expected to be finalized in February 2015.

Overall Commission Goals for 2015

The Commission will continue to promote the preservation of valuable open spaces, the preservation of natural vegetation and stream valleys within the urban, suburban and rural environment, and the development of trails and other appropriate recreational and transportation facilities for pedestrians and bicyclists.

In addition, the Commission will promote the protection of the natural environment where appropriate to serve the public interest, with equal consideration for long-term care of the environment and the short-term pressures of growth and continue to seek funding sources for additional trails and land acquisition. The Commission also feels that it is important to work with and reach out to other Commissions and agencies in order to reach common goals.

Commission Goals for 2015

1. Continue to support the Downtown and Urban Open Space Plan for the city, vital with our pace of growth for preservation of our open spaces and our environment (implementation of Comprehensive Plan policies 7.2.2.h and 10.1.3e).
2. Promote funding for *implementation* of the adopted 2011 update of the Durham Trails and Greenways Master Plan including but not limited to; other grant proposals, open space acquisition and trail construction funds through a bond referendum and/or as an annual appropriation in the Capital Improvement Program. Existing funds have been expended for new trail construction.
3. Support the creation of a Parks Foundation and the “Pennies for Parks” initiative as funding sources for trails and open space.
4. Continue to promote the adopted Eastern Durham Open Space Plan in Eastern Durham and support City/County staff in the construction, completion, and management of the Mountains to Sea Trail. This proposed trail is an integral part of the Eastern Durham Open Space Plan and the “missing link” between Penny’s Bend and Wake County. This portion of the trail is a vital link to the Eno trail system, the proposed Falls Lake Initiative and eastern Durham.
5. Update the adopted New Hope Creek Master Plan.

6. Recommend that the Flat River Plan (Comprehensive Plan policy 7.2.2g) be made a high priority on the work program so that land acquisitions that are currently occurring in the northeast portions of the County can be incorporated into an adopted plan.
7. Seek out new funding sources such as grants, and corporate or other private-public partnerships that may help contribute to possible construction and or acquisition of open space and trails.
8. Continue to reach out to the Durham community through publication of maps, our web site presence, educational brochures, and participation in Earth Day, Festival for the Eno, Center Fest, and production of maps. Continue to reach out to the community and educate neighborhoods and others on our efforts including educational endeavors.
9. Advocate for open space and trails, express citizen concerns regarding open space and trails to Durham's governing boards, and communicate plans and programs to the general public.
10. Provide recommendations for zoning map changes/development and site plans to uphold the *Durham Trails and Greenways Master Plan*, and pedestrian accessibility as well as the preservation of open space and respect for environmentally sensitive areas.
11. Continue to advocate for ongoing trail maintenance including the Adopt-a-Trail Program and quarterly work days.
12. Continue to facilitate the Durham County Matching Grants Program.
13. Promote the regional connectivity of trails, bike lanes, and sidewalks.
14. Provide and explore more diversity on the Commission and diversity in relationship to trails, greenways, open space and education.

Attachments

(Appendix I. Durham Open Space and Trails Commission Attendance).
Accomplishments List
Budget Request